

Signed, *Kinnaird*

K10

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Maurice Oliver Pease, Esquire

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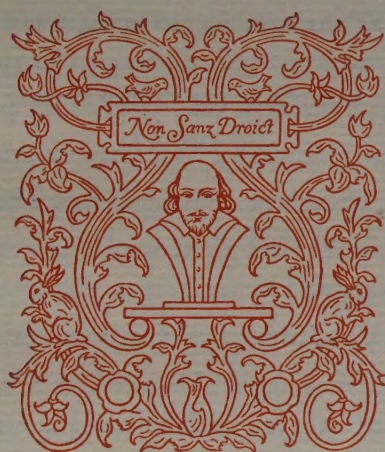
George Moore

*The Making of an
Immortal*

The Making of an Immortal

A Play in One Act

By George Moore



New York

THE BOWLING GREEN PRESS

London : Faber & Gwyer, Ltd.

Mcmxxvii

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES
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Preface & Dedicatory

THE *play entitled The Making of an Immortal was written by me about three years ago, and it lay at the bottom of a drawer 'half-remembered and half-forgotten,' for it was neither curtain-raiser nor an evening's entertainment but something between the two, a play that would last in representation an hour and a half; and foreseeing that if it were sent to a manager all sorts and kinds of proposals for cuts and transpositions would be made, I continued to allow it to bide in the dust till my secretary asked me if I intended to do anything with it. Her interest awakened a hope of a volume of plays, a hope that passed quickly, so forlorn was it; but Mr. Wells happening to call a few days later to inquire if I had enough story by me to fill a small book, I spoke to him about the comedy, and in a few minutes he had forgotten his original quest. 'I am glad the play meets with your approval,' I said, 'but it needs*

some snatches of Elizabethan idiom. You are not leaving for America yet awhile?' 'Not for a few days,' he answered. 'Long enough for me to put the finishing hand to this manuscript,' I replied, and bethought myself of a reading of the play to Professor Tonks and to the choice company that assembles in his studio on Saturday evenings. It would be out of keeping for me to attempt any account of the courtesy given to my stumbling reading in Vale Avenue, but this I may tell, and must: that the reading justified me in asking my old friend if he would allow me to dedicate The Making of an Immortal to him — 'Heard,' I said, 'for the first time in a studio where we have spent so many pleasant evenings discussing ancient and modern art.'

'But why all this tittle-tattle about a one-act play?' some indignant reader asks, and I answer him that Mr. Wells is responsible for the tittle-tattle; and I would remind the

Dedictory

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reader, too, that tittle-tattle is a very convenient way of escaping from controversy—a remark that he will better understand when he has read the play.

G. M.

Characters in the Play

<i>Richard Burbage</i>	
<i>Anthony Grindle</i>) Litter-bearers
<i>Christopher Firk</i>	
<i>Jack Fold</i>	
<i>Jack Thornley</i>	} Boy actors
<i>Prenny Lister</i>	
<i>Stephen Frion</i>	
<i>Robert Warner</i>	
<i>Henry Cuffe</i>	
<i>Ben Jonson</i>	
<i>Francis Bacon</i>	
<i>William Shakespeare</i>	
<i>Queen Elizabeth</i>	
<i>Javelin Men</i>	
<i>Players</i>	

The Making of an Immortal

Scene: *The gardens of the Palace at Whitehall in October, 1599. Near Whitehall Gate a litter stands, with the litter-bearers, Anthony Grindle, a man of forty, and Christopher Firk, a young man of twenty, beside it. There are also several javelin men who represent the Queen's guard.*



(Burbage Enters from the Palace.)

BURBAGE:



MESSENGER! A messenger!

FIRST JAVELIN MAN

If his errand be not far, sir,—

BURBAGE

No farther than the Strand.

SECOND JAVELIN MAN

Then Jim Hurd, the boy from *The Boar's Head*, might take it.

GRINDLE

He hath the business of *The Boar's Head* to look after, but if Master Kemp have business for him one of the hangers-by will be glad to take your letter, sir.

BURBAGE

Then fetch one, for my business is urgent. This letter is from Councillor Bacon to Master Jonson, whom he needs. I may say the letter is on the Queen's business; let him explain himself so to the guard.

(One of the men runs out. Burbage walks up and down impatiently.)

GRINDLE *(to Burbage)*

Your waiting will not be for long, sir. He will be back in less than a minute, bringing with him old Jack Fold, and Jack'll be glad of a sixpence, if you'll give as much, Master Burbage. It's long since he has seen the sight of one.

BURBAGE

Yes, I'll give as much.

(Enter the Javelin man, followed by Jack Fold.)

JAVELIN MAN

The gates were not a dozen yards behind me

when I was at the heels of my man. A moment later and I should have missed him.

BURBAGE

Fold, thy name is?

FOLD

Jack Fold, sir, a messenger who rarely fails to deliver the letter entrusted to him.

BURBAGE

I'd have liked better to hear thee say, never fails.

FOLD

No messenger can say as much, even the best. I was sent once to a house that stood no longer, and once to a house that the owner was leaving for ever.

BURBAGE

How couldst thou have knowledge that he would not change his mind and return?

FOLD

For he was in his coffin, sir, whence there is no returning nor change of mind. So I turned into *The Boar's Head*, or was it *The Rose and Crown*? and I drank to the health of him gone round the corner of the street. It was the heir who paid me to drink all health and happiness, sir, else the tankard never goes to my lips till the

message be delivered, and not into the hands of a slattern maid-servant, nor given in charge to the landlord, his wife, or his family, but taken straight to the man—

BURBAGE

The moment is pressing, else I would listen to thee. Take this letter to thirteen, Water Lane, where thou'lt find Master Benjamin Jonson.

FOLD

I know the house, sir.

BURBAGE

Thou'lt find him at home, for I know him to be at his desk writing. Bring him along with thee and thou shalt have a shilling.

FOLD

And if I cannot bring him?

BURBAGE

Here is sixpence. Bring him, and thou shalt have the other half, so hence and look to mend thy fortune.

(Exit Jack Fold with the letter. Burbage returns to the Palace.)

GRINDLE

Sixpence for running round a corner! I would

run round two or three for as much . . . though I am litter-bearer to the Queen.

F I R K

I, too, am litter-bearer to the Queen and would run round many corners at sixpence apiece.

G R I N D L E

Now, how long hast thou been litter-bearer to her Majesty?

F I R K

Not overlong, a week, methinks; but I am among the Queen's litter-bearers for thy words in praise of my calves directed the eyes of the steward to me.

G R I N D L E

I said but what was right and what any man can see for himself, that thou hast the height and the shoulders for the up-bearing of a litter, and the calves to stand the strain when there's a hill to pull up; but thy breath is laboured at the top of Ludgate Hill when the Queen hath business at the Tower.

F I R K

Her Majesty goes to Nonsuch when the play is over?

G R I N D L E

Whence she came to see the play that Master Burbage's company is performing.

F I R K

Now, how far may Nonsuch be from London?

G R I N D L E

Not less than sixteen miles.

F I R K

Sixteen miles! We shall all fall in a heap on the road and the Queen in the middle of us.

G R I N D L E

Did man hear ever such trash talked by a litter-bearer! We take her Majesty to her coach.

F I R K

I know not the way of the Court, not having been about it for long, but belike thou canst tell me why the Queen has come from Nonsuch to hear a play.

G R I N D L E

Hadst thou been carrying her Majesty so long as I, thou wouldst have learnt her taste for plays and writings and poets and musicians; and all these have thriven since the crown was placed upon her head by the Archbishop of Canterbury, or was it York? And music, too, is her pastime, as it was her father's before her.

F I R K

'Tis pleasant to hear thee; thy talk helps the time away like a play.

GRINDLE

Her Majesty likes the smack of a good play, and Whitehall hath seen many grave tragedies, courtly masques, bawdy comedies, and sometimes baitings of bulls and bears. But she is growing an old woman now and an old woman has little thought for pleasure; the memory of what she's had is bitterness enough.

FIRK

Come over the burn to Leicester, Bess—

GRINDLE

Hush! If that ballad should be heard on thy lips! Leicester is dead and his son in Italy, and her Majesty's thought now is for her kinsman, the Earl of Essex, who troubles her in many ways, but 'tis she loveth him ever and would give him all things.

FIRK

It's a great thing to be an old woman's darling!

GRINDLE

Hush! This is the second time I've warned thee. Canst thou not take a warning, Chris? Now mind me, thou'rt a young man and will doubtless carry many a fine lady to the play and elsewhere. Therefore learn from me that silence is expected of all servants and of none more than

from litter-bearers; so when thou takest a lady whither her fancy calls her, remember naught of the streets thou goest by or returnest by, nor the door that thy load was laid down before, nor whether manservant or maidservant or the gallant himself opened the door to the lady that thou hadst the honour of bearing to him; remember naught but thine hours of attendance, nor shouldst thou remember them too nearly. My forbears were in the trade, and never had one of them a tale to tell. Fashion thyself after them.

F I R K

But I know them not.

G R I N D L E

I am they, bearing in me all their qualities. Take thy lesson from me and thou'lt be a wise and successful litter-bearer, and wilt be rewarded with a pension if thy lady or gentleman be honourable. But a gabber, that is what the clergy call anathema; the word means accursed, and we being good Protestants—

(Sounds of footsteps and voices are heard from the Palace.)

F I R K

Hearken! The play must be over.

(The doors of the Palace open and eight boy actors enter dressed as women, carrying their shoes in their hands. Among them are Jack Thornley, Prenny Lister, Stephen Frion, Robert Warner and Henry Cuffe.)

FRION

Now, did I not tell you that if we kept our shoes on, the boards would creak and we should be caught.

(The boys put on their shoes.)

WARNER

I would go down to the river; mayhap the Queen's barge is there, and the water-men might take us under a bridge or two.

CUFFE

But if old Burbage should want us and come calling down the gardens he'd put us on bread and water for two days.

LISTER

I don't know why we should stay listening to an old play with twenty-three men in it and only four women, and no battle, only a bit of talk about tilting. Now, if they would but tilt!

THORNLEY

If they had the play out in the gardens here they could tilt.

(Lister and Thornley talk aside.)

WARNER

Teddy likes me in his part of the lady-in-waiting. He speaks his lines prettily when he asks if he should dance and so distract the Queen's melancholy.

CUFFE

A tedious play though it hath one good scene; all plays are tedious in which much is spoken about the realm, long speeches about statecraft.

THORNLEY

Methinks the Queen hears enough of the realm and statecraft in the Tower without hearing it all over again on the stage. And the play which we were to act to-day—

WARNER

Will be acted to-morrow.

LISTER

The Queen will not come to see it.

CUFFE

And played in the Temple gardens under yellow boughs, our play will be in grey attire, how-

ever brisk our voices. It should be kept for the spring.

FRION

Summer Is Icumen In should be kept till the spring and played under a roof, for April winds are cold.

THORNLEY

I like my shepherd, for he woos well.

LISTER

And I like my Queen and am sorry when my ministers come to bid me return to statecraft. 'Tis the first time, Jack, that thou'st played a man's part, and it was whilst dressing for Juliet that thy beard was reaped for the first time.

THORNLEY (*pushing Lister away*)

Let none touch my face. Take thy hands off me! Do not dare it! A man's voice came to me with my beard, but thy cracked voice, Master Prenny, will remain with thee till thy death, setting the audience asking: Is it a woman or a man?

LISTER

I'll show thee that I'm man enough for thee, though I be beardless.

(*Thornley and Lister begin to fight, but are separated by the other boys.*)

WARNER

Raise not your voices. Whichever way the fight goes both will get a whipping.

(The boys lower their voices.)

CUFFE

Now what were we saying when Jack Thornley was ready to cuff Prenny Lister for talking, about a beard that sprouted so freely that the stage was kept waiting whilst he got it off?

FRION

That our poets write too few parts for girls and women.

LISTER

There are women enough in Shakespeare's plays, and good parts, too, for all of them; even the meanest wench has a good line or two . . .
(Pause.) What fault have you to find with Juliet?

THORNLEY

Was I not waiting for thee to speak her name?

LISTER

We have to play it together, Master Thornley.

THORNLEY

Ah! then old Burbage spake of me as the next Romeo?

LISTER

No; but as the nurse.

*(The boys laugh and crowd round Lister
to save him from Thornley.)*

THORNLEY

Since we may not stray out of Burbage's hearing let the audience muster to hear Master Prenny's Juliet. Now, Master Prenny, stand thee by this pedestal, which we will accept for our window.

Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear
That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops—

LISTER

O! swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon,
That monthly changes in her circled orb,
Lest that thy love prove likewise variable.

THORNLEY

What shall I swear by?

LISTER

Do not swear at all;
Or, if thou wilt, swear by thy gracious self,
Which is the god of my idolatry,
And I'll believe thee.

THORNLEY

If my heart's dear love—

LISTER

Well, do not swear. Although I joy in thee,
I have no joy of this contract to-night:
It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden;
Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be
Ere one can say it lightens. Sweet, good-night!
This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath,
May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet.
Good-night, good-night! as sweet repose and rest
Come to thy heart as that within my breast!

(The boys begin to applaud Lister.)

THORNLEY

Good actors ye may be, all, but poor judges
of acting if that reading of Juliet pleases you.
And now, despite the sprouting of my beard, I'll
show you Juliet! *(He takes Lister's place.)* Give me
the cue, Prenny.

(Enter Burbage from the Palace.)

BURBAGE

Peace, boys, peace, I say, else it will be asked
within whose are the voices without.

THORNLEY

We stole out on tip-toe, sir,—

BURBAGE

To rehearse *Summer Is Icumen In*?

THORNLEY

No, Master Burbage, but a scene from *Romeo and Juliet*.

BURBAGE

My new Juliet! Well, I give you leave to walk about the gardens now, but be within call of my whistle, for a madrigal in praise of the Queen is to be sung.

THORNLEY

Is her Majesty pleased, sir, with James, who plays the Queen to King Richard?

BURBAGE

Thou must have lost thy wits to think that her Majesty's purpose in Whitehall is to distinguish between James Fenner and Jack Thornley!

(Burbage returns to the Palace.)

FRION

I will to the river to view the Queen's barge.

WARNER

But the river is out of range of the whistle; and the Queen may distribute largesse.

CUFFE

Ah, then shall I be there.

LISTER

And I. Will the Queen scatter silver pennies among us?

THORNLEY

I go to con my part yonder in the green alley,
and Frion, who plays with me, will come too,
and make our study companionable.

*(Re-enter Burbage from the Palace. The
boys move away, but Lister loiters a little.)*

BURBAGE

Prenny, I'd send thee with a letter to Master
Jonson if I could trust thee not to linger on the
way.

LISTER

Indeed, sir, I'll take thy letter willingly to
Master Jonson; but to run fast I must get myself
out of this gown.

*(He takes off his gown and hands it to
Burbage.)*

BURBAGE

I have neither paper nor ink-horn, and must
tell the message to thee.

LISTER

I shall remember it, sir.

BURBAGE

There is not more than fifteen minutes be-
tween Whitehall and Water Lane?

L I S T E R

Not that, sir, if I run.

B U R B A G E

I've sent a messenger to Water Lane, thirteen, Master Jonson's number, with a letter telling him to come straightway to Whitehall, but he delays—Ah! here comes my messenger.

(Enter Jack Fold.)

Prenny, get thee into thy gown again and join the other boys, but stray not out of hearing of my whistle.

(Lister puts on the gown and goes out.)

F O L D

Master Jonson, sir, told me to hasten on in front of him, and my breathing tells you how fast I've run.

B U R B A G E

I spoke of a second sixpence if thou didst bring him back.

F O L D

Master Jonson follows me, sir. Hearken!

B U R B A G E

Ay, truly, Jonson's footsteps those, ponderous as a Shire horse. Thou hast earned thy money. Here, take it.

(Exit Fold.)

(Enter Ben Jonson.)

J O N S O N

Now, Master Burbage, in my haste to answer thy summons I lost an inspiration that may never be recaptured.

B U R B A G E

Thy footsteps announced thee. I was thinking of a certain contrast.

J O N S O N

And what might that be?

B U R B A G E

The lightness of thy wit and the heaviness of thy step.

J O N S O N

Well, wouldst have it the other way, light-footed, heavy-witted? But it was not for the discharge of a quip thou didst send for me thus inopportunely. Is the play I'm writing for thee in thy purpose? Has it aught to do with changes in the book thou hast bought from me? I can make none; the play is too far advanced.

B U R B A G E

Master Bacon is the real sender of the message.

J O N S O N

And where may he be now?

BURBAGE

In attendance on the Queen, come to hear—

JONSON

I know it, *Summer Is Icumen In*, by Sherbrooke. I know his verses too, that stumble from iambs into anapaests.

BURBAGE

To ears so tenderly attuned as thine, Master Jonson, music, verbal or instrumental, must be a sore trial.

JONSON

A sore trial, indeed. But I have not come hither for talk of music.

BURBAGE

It is thou who talkest of music to me.

JONSON

What am I here for?

BURBAGE

To hear the name of the play that the Queen has ordered and which is now being performed, *Richard the Second*.

JONSON

Ah!

BURBAGE

Thy wit seems already on the track of something.

J O N S O N

So the Queen has brought thee and thy company of players to Whitehall that she may see a king unthroned!

B U R B A G E

Belike she fears that some of her disloyal subjects may take a hint from the play.

J O N S O N

Nay, her Majesty hath a bulwark in the hearts of her loving subjects, and it will go hard with the conscience of this realm ere it slip back again into the hold of mass-priests.

B U R B A G E

But thyself, Master Jonson, wast a Papist once.

J O N S O N

Even thou, Burbage, cannot remember that I recanted mine errors, which endured, indeed, but for a little while. In his recantation of error a man is doubly a Protestant. Buy play-books and hire actors, Burbage, but meddle not with my conscience.

B U R B A G E

I beg thee to believe that I meant no offence.

J O N S O N

But what am I here for? Speak, Burbage; my

muse abides my returning. Thou tellest me the Queen has ordered a performance of a play in which a king is deposed, and Master Bacon has sent for me, which does not surprise me overmuch, Master Burbage. I would have thee go at once to Master Bacon and say that I wait upon him.

B U R B A G E

He is with her Majesty. How can I approach him?

J O N S O N

I cannot tell thee how; but get thee gone to the hall to wait till his eyes fall upon thee. It behooves him to find the occasion to escape. I can tell thee that much, but no more.

B U R B A G E

Since the matter is so pressing—

J O N S O N

Why didst thou write the word pressing if his business with me admits of delay? He would not keep my muse waiting, nor I his.

(Exit Burbage into the Palace.)

(Jonson crosses the stage and without any pretence of hiding himself passes among the trees, being unobserved by Prenny Lister, who enters muttering his part. Jonson approaches him.)

My boy, whose verses art thou mumbling, and
out of which play?

(Lister utters a cry.)

LISTER

Your voice was sudden, Master Jonson, for I
thought the grove empty.

JONSON

A fawn startled by a dog's yelp cries not more
plaintively. Who is this poet? *(He takes the book
from Lister and opens it.)*

Ladies, if it be pleasing to you, I
Will lead you under those flowering trees,
And, sitting in your midst, will tell a tale
Of knights and ladies in far Sicily.

Boy, I would hear thy part if the poet were other
than the long-eared Sherbrooke, whose braying
about knights and ladies in Sicily afflicts my
stomach worse than any emetic, and I would not
puke, for the Queen is expected.

LISTER

I am sorry you will not hear me, for my speak-
ing of the verses disguises the many faults that
you discern in him—I mean, I would fain think
that it did.

J O N S O N

So thou canst distinguish the false from the true?

L I S T E R

I can, or think I can, which is nearly the same thing. . . May I ask a question of you, Master Jonson?

J O N S O N

Question me, boy.

L I S T E R

I would know why the women are so few in your plays and the men so many, why the women talk so little and the men so much. In this dost thou hold the mirror to Nature?

J O N S O N

A fair question to put to a poet, and I'll answer it by saying that I'll write a part for thee.

L I S T E R

O, Master Jonson, you'll write a part for me? Then may I tell you in what manner I would it might be written?

J O N S O N

Thou mayest indeed, but be quick about it, for I wait—

L I S T E R

For Master Burbage?

J O N S O N

No; for Master Bacon. I have sent a message to him— Ah! here he comes.

(Enter Francis Bacon. Lister withdraws to back of stage.)

A boy player, Master Bacon, who in rehearsal shows himself the best Juliet yet seen, so Burbage tells me.

B A C O N

We have matter more serious than Juliets, good or bad, to talk about. This play, *Richard the Second*, has given the Queen such offence that—

L I S T E R *(coming forward)*

Master Jonson, I would ask you if there is danger of the theatres being closed, for then the chance come to me of playing Juliet will be lost belike for ever.

J O N S O N

Run away, boy, and study the part Sherbrooke has written for thee, and disturb us not with thy questions.

(Exit Lister.)

B A C O N

The theatres will be closed and the actors put in the stocks if this play of *Richard the Second* be performed again.

J O N S O N

But Burbage and his company came hither at the Queen's command to perform the play.

B A C O N

The play has been given in the streets within the last two months—I have not the date in mind—and some ill rumours of it having reached her Highness she hath now sent for the players that she may herself judge what mischief may lurk in it. And having heard the play, or most of it, she is now bent on finding the author of it. I said: Shakspeare, but she answered: Pens do not rise from their inkstands and write tragedies; a human hand holds the pen, and I must see that hand. Jonson, she thinks the hand is the hand of Essex.

J O N S O N

A strange thought indeed in one so wise.

B A C O N

After his mischances in Ireland he broke in upon her, stained with travel, in the Bedchamber before undern, yet, as the Maids say, her face lighted at the sight of him. But suspicion of his disloyalty gathered suddenly in her mind before noon and he was ordered to keep his chamber.

J O N S O N

But Essex is no traitor.

B A C O N

It was by her Majesty's command that the charges were not pressed against him last June, and with the full approval of Coke I made light of many pamphlets and books that in my heart I knew could have no other aim but to draw allegiance from the Queen.

J O N S O N

But this play, *Richard the Second*,—

B A C O N

As I told thee, good Ben, my lord of Essex is much suspected by her Highness to have had a hand in this play, and moreover to have had a traitor's intent in the writing of it. Thou knowest, poet and friend, that it was written as a piece of history, relating the disposition and death of a king, without drawing any moral outside that which Nature had implanted in it. We have read it together, Jonson, in Gray's Inn, in days of poverty, and it was laid by—

J O N S O N

Yes, yes; but how did Essex come upon it?

BACON

Essex knows all my writings; we were as brothers; his letters were written by me and my advice was sought on all matters, but unhappily seldom followed. In Essex lay my misprision and the Queen's. We judged him a great man; and I saw in him a worthy successor to Elizabeth, one who would bear high the Protestant interest in Europe. To his weaknesses I closed mine eyes, persuading myself that he would outgrow them, but they have outgrown him; and despite the many waverings which precede the Queen's every act, she will, if need be, send her darling to the scaffold, and my fear is lest I find myself compelled to ask that he be adjudged guilty. It will be hard, but I cannot suffer any taint of disloyalty. My assurances to the Queen that Essex is not the author of the play will not satisfy her.

JONSON

But it is known that "Shakspeare" is the author.

BACON

Have I not said, Jonson, that she must have the author in flesh and blood before her?

JONSON

Ay, marry, the author not only of *Richard*

the Second, but of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *King John*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Will she believe that any man could have written six such excellent works, and moreover—how many are thy Henrys?

BACON

Henry the Sixth was an old play. Let us not go into that matter. A poet we must find, and if I know human nature—

JONSON

Thy works prove this, and well.

BACON

Then believe me, a simple man with little wisdom in his mouth and the semblance of any small trader will be accepted more easily than a garrulous poet that looks like—

JONSON

Sherbrooke! . . . If I were not the author of some poems of merit, mayhap my appearance would be accepted by the Queen.

BACON

This is no moment for thy pleasantries, Jonson. I am not so foolish as to ask this of thee; thy style is explicit everywhere in thy works; and

certain gentlemen of the craft would be chosen to give testimony, and all would concur that another sought shelter behind thy name. The poet whom thou must discover, Jonson, should be unsuspected of political intrigue, not a Papist, rather a simple follower of Paul.

J O N S O N

A hard task thou hast set me, Master Bacon.
And when must this victim—

B A C O N

No victim, Jonson, for the Queen admires the play and is only angry because she suspects the Earl's hand in it.

J O N S O N

And if she suspected the hand of another, one who will rise to the highest dignity of the State—

B A C O N

Hush, Jonson! For Essex's sake, hush! The Queen will reward a churl; find one, assuring him that he will be rewarded.

J O N S O N

A simple liver, who would as lief range with simple livers in content than— How do the words go? Something about a golden sorrow.

B A C O N

Hush, hush! One man loses his head for that
which wins another a purse of gold.

J O N S O N

A hard task thou hast set me.

*(The doors of the Palace open and the
Players, including Shakespeare, enter,
speaking among themselves.)*

F I R S T P L A Y E R

We are the Queen's players.

S E C O N D P L A Y E R

And we speak the words set down by the poets, and if these words give offence to her Majesty let them be punished and not those who speak them.

F I R S T P L A Y E R *(to Burbage)*

We would hear from you, Master Burbage, why your lips failed to pronounce that the royal line was not altered whether Richard or the Duke of Lancaster was upon the throne.

B U R B A G E

Truly, they were kinsmen, but seems it to thee, Master Chitwell, that I should challenge the Queen's judgement that the play is not suited to the times?

THIRD PLAYER

Is it then certain that her Majesty will order the closing of the theatres?

BURBAGE

This play was not suspected of disloyalty till Spanish ships came up the Channel.

FIRST PLAYER

Why, the Armada was scattered a dozen years ago.

BURBAGE

But Spain has not forgone hopes of conquest. Therefore I say to you all that the play of *Richard the Second* is no fit play to be represented in the streets.

FIRST PLAYER

It was an accident of fortune that Bolingbroke—

BURBAGE

Forth with that cry, player, and make the closing of the theatres a certainty!

THIRD PLAYER

Now, if Master Burbage spoke little, Shakespeare spoke less. (*To Shakespeare*) Yet thou sharpest the theatre with him.

SHAKESPEARE

Well, I am one of several.

SECOND PLAYER

Why didst thou not speak in defence of our loyalty and thine own, and of the name thou bearest, which is that of the poet who wrote the play?

SHAKESPEARE

The poet's name is "Shakspere." Mine is Shakespeare and no enigma in it.

BURBAGE

The Queen is right, my friends. *Richard the Second* is no play for these times, and when you lay your heads on your pillows to-night remember that docility often wins favour with her Majesty.

(The Players go out. Shakespeare turns to follow them, but Jonson detains him.)

JONSON

We would have a word with thee, Master Shakespeare.

(Shakespeare returns, obviously pleased at being distinguished from his fellow-players.)

Master Bacon, to whom the Queen often turns for counsel, would have asked thee to plead the cause of the play, which thy good sense would have allowed thee to do better than another; but

her Majesty is much cast down by the Earl of Essex, and, as thou hast said, Master Burbage, docility sometimes prevails where logic fails.

BURBAGE

Thy wit is with thee always, Master Jonson, and thou judgest our Shakespeare rightly. His good sense is our entertainment at *The Mermaid* tavern in the evenings. And now, having business to attend to, I pray you to excuse me, sirs.

(*Exit Burbage.*)

SHAKESPEARE

Such good sense as God hath given me I strive to bring into my calling, and in the evenings at *The Mermaid* I dispense it, but am not always listened to, for poets and players too, live in the day and hour.

JONSON (*to Bacon*)

One of Shakespeare's wise sayings is: The player struts his little life upon the stage.

BACON

The world is a stage and we all strut upon it.

SHAKESPEARE

I trust, Master Bacon, that you will plead against the closing of the theatre, for all my present poor savings lie in it; and since *The Mer-*

maid tavern has been mentioned I would have you know, sir, that I spend less money there than any other member of the company. Indeed, my thrift has become a by-word amongst my merry masters yonder.

J O N S O N

A thrifty soul, Master Bacon, if ever there was one.

S H A K E S P E A R E

The closing of the theatres will bring more than one thrifty man to ruin.

J O N S O N (*to Bacon*)

Truly, it will go against thy heart to see this done to so sensible a man, one of the stock that goes to make this our nation, for he placeth his money not in plays alone but in bricks and mortar, taking shares in houses which be let at seemly rents in London, and lending money on mortgage in his own good town of Stratford.

S H A K E S P E A R E

I left the country when I was a raw lad, and would entrust no money of mine to ploughing and harrowing. Put money in houses, Master Bacon! They are safer far than crops; crops rot in the fields and cattle die, but your houses stand firm. And if the theatre be not closed and it

yields me what I look for, I will purchase some more houses and end my days peaceably, using belike the good sense for which I am reputed over a tankard in the ale-house down in Stratford.

BACON

But quiet often ends in weariness, Master Shakespeare. Thinkest that after the company of *The Mermaid* tavern thou canst settle thyself to listen to humble livers?

SHAKESPEARE

Ay, but in casual talk over tobacco and beer news leaks out that whoso hath an ear can turn to his profit.

BACON

But the hours are long, from early morn till eventide.

SHAKESPEARE

The hours will not be long enough for me. I think my tenants be all good and honest men, but tenants need watching, and quarterday must be always at the back of a man's mind. Tenants call for repairs to be done, and repairs are worse than moths amid clothes; Holy Writ speaks of moths and rust, but repairs are your true devourers, as I know, having paid many bills.

BACON (*to Jonson*)

Hath not Master Burbage a very hoard of wisdom to draw upon in Shakespeare? But say, Master Shakespeare, will there be nought in Stratford for thee to do but put money aside?

SHAKESPEARE

Ay, truly, there is the Grammar School in which I learnt the little of book knowledge that I have; little though it be, it hath served me, and that Grammar School I shall keep mine eye upon always, so that a Stratford lad shall have better chances than I, when he comes to London.

JONSON

Thou art not fair, Master Shakespeare, to the Grammar School at Stratford. (*To Bacon*) Of Latin he hath a fair share and some Greek; but our Shakespeare is a glutton for learning and has picked up much on his way through life.

SHAKESPEARE

Our poet, Master Bacon, will allow me some Latin but he will not credit me with Greek.

JONSON

Allow thee some Latin, Shakespeare! It is not many nights since I heard thee say at *The Mermaid* that Latin was the same to thee as English, and I believed it.

SHAKESPEARE

My words did not go so far, Master Jonson. We are hot-bloods at *The Mermaid*, Master Bacon, and Master Jonson was laying down the law that no man could understand Latin as fully as did the Latins themselves, words that I could not let pass without a protest; and I cited Latin in support of my contention, asking if he (Master Jonson) would have it that the words: *Credo in unum Deum*, meant more than the English words: I believe in one God. From Latin I passed on to Greek, and calling for paper and an ink-horn I wrote words that were passed round.

JONSON

Write them for us.

(He hands Shakespeare pen and paper.)

SHAKESPEARE *(taking Jonson aside)*

I have forgotten the true spelling of ———
(He whispers a word. Jonson murmurs the spelling to him. Bacon walks up the stage.) Master Bacon is a French scholar?

JONSON

He knows French excellently well. Add an epigram in French.

SHAKESPEARE (*writing*)

Nous sommes allés à l'école.

JONSON (*handing the paper to Bacon*)

Here we have Latin, Greek and French, and yet our poet speaks slightly of the school at Stratford!

BACON

The schoolmaster has earned this testimony. Send it to him.

(Jonson takes the paper and puts it in his pocket with solemn dignity.)

SHAKESPEARE

A poet, no, though twice called one by Master Jonson. I only speak the words of poets, "bombasting out a blank verse," as that losel Greene once wrote of me.

JONSON (*to Bacon*)

Plays come we know not whence, nor by whom they are written. A great secret is hidden in certain plays.

SHAKESPEARE,

"In certain plays"—how sayest thou? I love a secret, and can keep one. Trust me with it, Master Jonson.

JONSON

Thou wouldst not deceive us, Shakespeare,

and if thou wouldst thine endeavour were vain,
for we are not so ill-instructed but we can discern
a poet's hand immediately he puts two
rhymes together. Had I been born blind I
should have discovered thee in the song:

Who is Silvia? what is she,
That all our swains commend her?

SHAKESPEARE

That song is common upon all lips.

JONSON

To-day it is, but I heard thee singing it before
the play was enacted. Also before *King John*
was played I heard thee muttering verses in a
corner of *The Mermaid* tavern, and some of
Constance's speech was found in a portfolio of
thine. Last night we were favoured with verses.

SHAKESPEARE

Your commendation of them filled my heart
with joy, Master Jonson. But you should not be-
tray your friend's muse; she should be as sacred
as his mistress.

JONSON

A pretty phrase, Shakespeare. Mark you how
pretty a phrase, Master Bacon. But he stands

convicted, and the Queen will be beholden to us for this discovery.

SHAKESPEARE

Master Jonson, what words do I hear! If you fasten *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* upon me it will be said that *Richard the Second* is mine also, and for it I shall be in the stocks to-morrow. Stay, stay, Master Jonson!

JONSON

Thou hast confessed a truth known among us all this many a day, Shakespeare, but think not of danger, for none there is. The Queen believes the play—

SHAKESPEARE

Master Jonson, I cannot listen to thee.

JONSON

Troth and faith! thou shalt listen, for thou must know that the Queen's anger is not for the play itself. Who is this secret author, quoth she, who writes of kings and queens and matters of state? Whose name, thinkest thou, doth she scent all over it? Why, none but the Earl of Essex! for queens suppose that none but the great are privy to great matters; but let it once be known that the play is by a humble liver from Stratford, and her anger will melt in admiration.

BACON

We will present thee to her Majesty as one who hath much knowledge vouchsafed to him in dreams, to whom all the sciences and languages of the world have been revealed—

JONSON

Ay, in dreams. Much truly hath been revealed to thee in dreams—Latin, and hardly less Greek.

SHAKESPEARE

Princes have been murdered in the Tower, kings have been deposed always, and plays written about them.

JONSON

Words of wisdom, Shakespeare. Princes have been murdered. But the present is no time for the telling of sad stories of the death of kings: how some have been deposed, some slain in war, some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed, some poison'd by their wives, some sleeping kill'd; all murdered. The Queen has escaped with her life from poisoners. Popish plots are knitted, and unravelled to be knitted again. Suspicion is like a pestilential breath; it blows where it listeth. The Queen suspects the highest, but let it be made known to her that the play comes from Stratford and she will reward thy poetry

with a purse of gold. (*Taking out his purse.*) Mine is empty, but the purse thou'lt get from her Majesty will be heavy, with enough pieces in it to purchase many houses in Stratford, and thou hast a fair liking for house property.

SHAKESPEARE

O, Master Jonson, I shake in my shoes and my knees tremble!

BACON

It is all in thy favour, Shakespeare, that the play was written ten years ago, ere the Spanish and Romish plots were laid—

JONSON

Ere the eggs were laid, yea, and before the cock trod the hen.

(*A flourish of trumpets is heard, announcing the coming of the Queen.*)

Put on thy best appearance, Master Shakespeare, and tell no lies, or thou'rt a lost man.

SHAKESPEARE

A lost man truly am I, for how shall I answer the questions that will be put to me? Shall I be asked if I wrote *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? (*He tries to escape.*)

Take thine hands from me, Master Jonson, take
thine hands from me, for face the Queen I can-
not. I should choke on the story.

J O N S O N

Before it is half told thou'lt be at roost in it,
the words coming from thee as easily as eggs
from a hen; and thou'lt cackle like a hen.

B A C O N

Shakespeare, it beseems thee to hearken to
Master Jonson, to whom thou hast confessed
thou didst write the piece. A little courage, and
thou'lt be rewarded, but lose courage, and God
help thee, we cannot.

S H A K E S P E A R E

It would be easier for me to run than to stay.

J O N S O N

Thou'dst be caught before thou camest to the
river. Better for thee to remember that three
minutes of hardihood is all that is needed for
thee to buy a house in Stratford and end thy life
comfortably in an ale-house.

S H A K E S P E A R E

Master Jonson, Master Bacon, you know not
what you ask of me, a poor player—

J O N S O N

Tell that to the Queen; call thyself a poor player.

(Enter Queen Elizabeth from the Palace with her Maids-of-Honour. Bacon advances to meet her.)

B A C O N

Your Majesty's charge to me was to discover the author of *Richard the Second*, which command I have been able to fulfil sooner than I thought for.

E L I Z A B E T H

And what insolent knave have you brought hither?

B A C O N

A seeming simple-minded yokel from Stratford.

E L I Z A B E T H

Where is Stratford?

B A C O N

I know not whether the small village of Stratford be situated in Warwickshire or in Staffordshire, but in it there is a Grammar School—

E L I Z A B E T H

And doth a yokel from a Grammar School write of the deposition of kings?

BACON

So seemeth it, your Highness. Our poet here was formerly a poor lad who held horses for a pittance in the streets of London.

ELIZABETH

But a man must have knowledge whereof he writeth.

BACON

He must truly, and the best knowledge comes to him he knows not whence nor how. Such knowledge is known as inspiration. The blind have been possessed of it, the deaf wait their turn; kings, slaves, all are equally subject to it. A contagion it is, your Majesty, which through a chink lodges in a madman's brain.

ELIZABETH

Homer was blind; Epictetus was a lame slave. But I cannot call to mind a mad poet.

BACON

Poets at first are all looked upon as mad.

ELIZABETH

Wherein then consists the madness of the author of *Richard the Second*, whom thou hast brought to me?

BACON

As I think, in the division of his life, for when this man is not in his dreams his thoughts are all on his rents (he hath become the proprietor of some houses in Stratford) and—

ELIZABETH

And when not collecting his rents, turns he to the writing of poetry and the deposition of kings?

BACON

It is even as your Majesty hath said. Will you speak with him?

ELIZABETH

I will indeed. Bid him approach.

JONSON (*to Shakespeare*)

Her Majesty calleth thee. Go, cast thyself upon thy knees.

(Shakespeare advances tottering and falls on his knees before the Queen.)

ELIZABETH

From Stratford, comest thou?

SHAKESPEARE

Yes, your Majesty.

ELIZABETH

And thy name?

SHAKESPEARE

If it please thee, William Shakespeare.

ELIZABETH

It pleaseth me right well. William Shakespeare, of Stratford. By my crown, a good square name! And they tell me thou writest plays, having no learning but what the Grammar School affords down yonder, and knowest all things by divine inspiration?

SHAKESPEARE

Your Majesty, the poor player who wrote the play of *Richard the Second* ten years ago begs mercy for the performance of it in an unpropitious hour.

BACON (*aside to Jonson*)

The word player fell well from his lips.

(*Elizabeth signs to Bacon, who crosses to her.*)

SHAKESPEARE

A poor player, your Majesty, come from Stratford to earn money enough to return thither and end his days where they began.

BACON

Humility is the quality of genius, for to know much brings a consciousness of the little we may

know of life and death and why we are betwixt
the twain.

(*He returns to Jonson.*)

ELIZABETH

The village begets the poet and the world proclaims him. We have given ear to thy muse, Shakespeare, ere now, and have found her delightful and harmless in the telling of our story from the reign of King John onwards. And thy telling of the dramatic feuds between Lancaster and York have pleased us, and thy happy imaginations of fairyland—Titania, Puck, Ariel—have charmed us and helped us to forget the heavy cares of our life. It would indeed have irked us to discover in the poet of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* a vulgar rebel, or one tainted with Popery.

SHAKESPEARE

Your Majesty, I have ever been of the Reformed faith.

ELIZABETH

And thy casual lot the motley, which we would wish thee now to drop for ever, considering all things alien to thee save the writing of poetry. We greet you well, Shakespeare, and give thee our hand, and proclaim thee chief

teller of our island's story. (*She extends her hand to Shakespeare.*) Thy Falstaff has amused us in the Henrys, and—ah, I am glad I thought on it, when I last saw thy Falstaff the wish came to me to see the fat knight in love. Perchance this subject may present itself to thee, and we will hope to see how he bears himself amid ale-houses and forests, and since fairies are part of thy inspiration we would meet them again on the stage. And now, since much time will be needed for the writing of this play, Master Shakespeare, we reward thee with a purse, and a crown of bay leaves shall be sent to thee from Nonsuch to-night.

(She gives the trembling Shakespeare a purse and turns to Bacon.)

My litter-bearers will take me to my coach, and to-morrow at Nonsuch we will confer with thee. The Earl of Essex parleys with the arch-rebel, Owen O'Neill, the Earl of Tyrone.

(The boy actors come up the gardens, led by Burbage, and sing the madrigal given here, which has been arranged for two voices, treble and alto.)

*Blow, shepherds, blow your pipes with glad-
some glee resounding.*

*See where the fair Eliza comes with love and
grace abounding.*

*Run, nymphs, apace, go meet her,
With flowers and garlands greet her,
All hail, Eliza fair, the country's pride and
glory!*

*Long may'st thou live our Queen renowned
in the island's story.*

(The litter-bearers come forward. Elizabeth enters the litter, which is carried off, followed by the Maids-of-Honour.)

SHAKESPEARE

Master Bacon, Master Jonson, I told you this would end in my ruin, for now a play is laid upon me which cannot be written by me. Falstaff in love! Falstaff in love! How may such a play be written? Why did I not throw myself at the Queen's feet and beseech her mercy, telling the truth, that I was but a player, able to blast out a blank line, but no more, no more.

BACON

The title will be: *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. What sayest thou to that for a title? Did not her Majesty say she would like a forest and must insist on some fairies?

SHAKESPEARE

A rare title! I see it on the bills.

BACON

Jonson and myself will take the play over.
And now, Shakespeare, a word of advice: let
thy tongue not cease to wag that Queen Eliza-
beth told thee thou wert England's poet.

SHAKESPEARE

She did. You heard her speak of the bays!

(Exit Shakespeare.)

JONSON

My Lord Chancellor, (for did not her Maj-
esty so hail thee?) I think to-day we have
assisted at the making of an immortal.

CURTAIN.





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